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PROCEEDINGS AT PUBLIC MEETINGS.

THE OPENING OF THE BELFAST ACADEMICAL INSTITUTION.

On the 1st inst. a very numerous meeting was held in the Academical buildings,

The MARQUIS OF DONÉGALL in the chair.

When the following address of the joint Board of Managers and Visitors, to the BELFAST MAG. NO. XXVII

Proprietors, and to the Public at large, was read by DR. DRENNAN, one of the Visitors, on the opening of the establishment.

My Lord, and Gentlemen,

On the opening of the Belfast Academical Institution, the joint Board of Managers

and Visitors, in whom the direction and superintendence of the Establishment are placed by law, have thought themselves under an obligation of office, to describe, in an address, the object and designs of those who first conceived this plan of popular education; and also to define the duties incumbent upon the Professors and Teachers, who are to carry the plan into execution, and put speculation to the test of experience.

The object of the Academical Institution was, and is, shortly and simply, this. To diffuse as widely as possible, throughout the province and population of Ulster, the benefits of education, both useful and liberal; and, by that means, to prevent the hard and disgraceful necessity, in such a great and prosperous community, of sending their children to seek, in other countries, with much risk to their health and morals, for that instruction, and those literary qualifications and honours, which might be equally well attained at home, with evident advantage to the public interest, as well as to that of individuals.

Assuredly, my Lord, and Gentlemen, in a general view of this subject, if we wish to make the next generation wiser and better than the present, which ought to be the desire of even the best among us, no means appears more conducive to this praiseworthy and patriotic purpose, than the establishment of such societies of liberal and ingenious men, uniting their labours, without regard to nation, sect, or party, in one grand pursuit, alike interesting to all, by which mutual prejudices may be worn off, a humane and truly philosophic spirit may be cherished in the heart as well as the head, in practice as well as theory; the happy result of which must be, that the youth intrusted to their care, will be stimulated by the imitation and example of their teachers, as well as by their own generous emulation, in the pursuit of knowledge, and in the practice of virtue.

The general improvement and ultimate perfection, in the plans and practice of education, must in a great degree, be brought about by the efforts of *individuals*; zealous and active individuals, persevering, and even indefatigable in working out an object which they know to be of public utility. Those who set out with a strong and powerful *will*, seldom fail to make way through every obstacle, to the performance. Nor is it at all necessary, that such individuals should, in an

undertaking like the present, be philosophers, or literary men, or of great science or erudition; nay, on the contrary, it may be rather expected that such men will be liberated, or as it were, enfranchised from those defects, or those incumbrances, so common in ancient foundations of *colleges*; where, although time may be said to have altered the use of things, yet a blind affection will *not yet* suffer it to be said that such institutions can ever degenerate.

Individuals, then, like those who originated the present Institution, neither grave Doctors, nor learned Masters, nor chained to college Precedents, as books are to their shelves; nor grown old in the habits of exclusions, and restrictions religious or professional, such individuals are, perhaps, likely to look into arts and sciences more *at large*; to estimate them more thoroughly, according to their real and relative value, and to bring them more home to the business and practice of daily life.

Not that we would wish to depreciate or disparage those venerable establishments, consecrated by time, and illustrious by the luminaries which have adorned, and do still adorn them, the more luminous perhaps, by shining in the dark; but all that we mean to say, is, that the Directors of *this* Institution have pointed their attention, not so much to copy the inalterable university codes, as to make the benefits of education pervade all ranks of life, and to improve their plan, yearly, or monthly, according to the increasing intelligence of the times, and the suggestions of the teachers employed, dictated, as we will suppose them to be, by that best of masters, Experience. Change, we know, is not always improvement, nor innovation, reform; but we must, at the same time, declare, we know not one of the departments of human life, that, after all which has been written and spoken upon the subject, is more susceptible of a meliorating change, than the business of Education, the blessed art of unfolding and perfecting the faculties and natural dispositions of Man, physical, moral, and scientific.

Six years have elapsed since the first subscriptions were made, for the erection of an Edifice to answer those purposes, which we flatter ourselves are now in a train of accomplishment. Although the proposal was entertained by our best Patron, the Public, with kindness and even with cordiality, it cannot be dissembled, that it

has been through many difficulties, much anxiety, and occasional despondence, the Managers have advanced thus far in their honest undertaking. But thus far they have advanced: and wishing to forget obstacles which have been overcome, they press forward to their ultimate object, with a reasonable confidence of success. They do rejoice, that, on this day, they can show to the Public, and their noble Patrons, a handsome and well-finished building, adapted to the uses for which it is intended, having six spacious rooms, with a house for the Classical Master, (on whom the future credit of this Establishment will so materially depend;) and another house for the English Master, with every accommodation for a considerable number of *boarders*: the whole Establishment, for study or exercise, in an airy and healthy situation; cheerful in its aspect; not sad and sequestered in the gloom of a cloister; with a prospect, in front, of a fair and flourishing town, uninfected, as we would hope, with the polluted air, or the contagious vices of a metropolis; and backed by a sublime and thought-inspiring mountain; for it is these grand features of nature, rather than the machinery of art, which ought to enlarge the soul, and dilate the affections in its earliest, and sweetest, and most lasting associations.

The Directors of this Institution (in whom both Managers and Visitors are included,) have done much, and yet have sanguine prospects of doing more. They indulge the hope, that the munificence of the Public, and the generosity of opulent individuals, will, in the course of some years, enable them to complete, in all its parts, the original plan of the Academical Institution; and that their noble President, the Marquis of Donegall, who laid the first stone in the foundation, will also have the opportunity of laying the last in the finished superstructure, "an honour, which they are persuaded, will not follow him reluctant in receiving it."

The Directors wish for the countenance of government; they wish for Parliamentary encouragement; but while they felicitate themselves in the friendship and influence of powerful Patrons, (among whom they wish, particularly, most respectfully, and affectionately, to mention the Marquis of Downshire,) they still rest their best hopes upon the interest they hold in the public opinion. Attracted from time to time, and then repelled by the great con-

ductors of the state; now soothed by courtesy, and then damped by disappointment, they will not desist from their endeavours to obtain a parliamentary grant; but their chief confidence is in the discernment of this Town, and this Province, with regard to its true interest. They do not scruple to acknowledge, that their local, and even their personal interests are concerned in the success of the Belfast Academical Institution; but their interests are, in the present case, closely, and, they trust, indissolubly connected with the good of the Public; and, if a single instance be adduced, in which, for these six years past, they have sacrificed that good to their private advantage, they will be content to forfeit all their pretensions to public esteem or confidence.

Their object is higher, and their ambition greater, than to form two or three schools, in a fine building, for the benefit of the inhabitants of Belfast only, and its immediate neighbourhood; they wish, in the course of some time, to supply to the youth of this Province, and this Country, the advantages of a complete course of Education; and they doubt not that the liberality of many public bodies, as well as individuals, will supply a fund for the endowment of different Professors, until the justice of Parliament will extend the same encouragement to literature in the North, as it has already done in the South of Ireland.

The primary purpose, then, of the Belfast Academical Institution, is, to make learning as popular as the Directors can possibly render it, to diffuse useful knowledge, particularly among the middling orders of society, as one of the necessities, rather than of the luxuries of life; not to have a good education, the portion only of the rich and the noble, but as a patrimony of the whole people. The pride of Philosophy, has, at all times, endeavoured to cover knowledge with a dark and mysterious veil, to secrete it from the bulk of mankind, and to make use of it for the purposes of a craft, rather than for the service of the community. We would tear down this veil from the top to the very bottom. Education has always appeared to us to be made more an initiation into professional mysteries, than an initiation into moral and intellectual manhood. We would then tear down that veil of prejudice, that makes one knowledge for the learned, and another for the vulgar; and we would

fully display before the whole people, the divine image of Education, encircled by her three children, Knowledge, Power, and Virtue; for Virtue is as nearly related to Knowledge, as Knowledge is to Power. This then is our intention; that the gates of this Seminary should be easily opened; that the rates of tuition, and of boarding, should be as low as they possibly could be made, under the circumstances of the times; and that even students should be admitted gratuitously, on the recommendation of liberal subscribers.

The Directors, in their choice of Masters, and in their admission of Scholars, are perfectly unbiassed by religious distinctions. They have sought for teachers, either in this or the other kingdom, wherever best recommended by their merits and experience in their professional departments, and by their morals and manners in their personal characters. Of nothing are the Boards more desirous, than that pupils of all religious denominations, should communicate, by frequent and friendly intercourse, in the common business of education, by which means a new turn might be given to the national character and habits, and all the children of Ireland should know and love each other.

Gentlemen Teachers, we have thus stated the object and intentions of the joint Boards of Managers and Visitors, but you are to realize this object by your attention and abilities. We have created the body of the Establishment, but you are, as it were, to breathe into it a living soul. You are the present depositaries of that precious trust, for which, you will always remember, that we are, in the first instance, and greatest degree, and *always* responsible. You are the executive, and we the legislative, both under the controul of the Proprietors at large.

We are perfectly sensible, that from our want of experience in the practice of teaching, through all its detail, we shall stand in need of your co-operating assistance and advice, in the management of the respective schools, and in the whole interior economy of the Establishment; but in requesting this advice and assistance, we trust we need not caution you against that undue assumption of superior information, which is apt to make professional men slight and undervalue the opinions of those not engaged in the same pursuits, who, notwithstanding, by their very distance, may take a more comprehensive view of things,

under their various bearings, while you, by your very proximity to your profession, may be apt to contract unreasonable prejudices, and ill-founded partialities. We feel it a very delicate and disagreeable task, to speak to professional men, of professional duties, nor, had we a doubt of your discharging yours with general satisfaction, would we have chosen you to fill your respective situations. Will the English Master allow us to recommend two great desiderata in our school education, composition in the native tongue, and occasional declamation from its principal authors? And will our learned and accomplished Classical Teacher, allow us to hope, that he will take the trouble or the pleasure of making a more judicious selection of school-books, or a better and more chaste extraction from those, than are taught in our present Seminaries of polite literature? Good elementary works, is an object of the first importance.

You will, Gentlemen, it is to be hoped, have pupils of every rank, of high and low connexion, and of every religious denomination; and we need scarcely inform you, that a school is a little commonweal under that steady but paternal monarchy, which gives the most impartial encouragement to merit, diligence, and good behaviour, wherever these qualities are found. A decided preference will, we doubt not, be secured to the most meritorious students, of whatever religion or rank in society.

We would, in general, express our desire, (and an address of this kind can only make use of general terms,) that the system of school-government were made as much remunerative, and as little penal, as possible: that it should act by motives on the mind, rather than by pains inflicted on the body; that example should teach, emulation should quicken, glory should exalt, a sentiment of honour should be cultivated, rather than to recur, oftener than is absolutely necessary, to manual correction, or corporal punishment. The correction of the Master's hand is, sometimes, the unhappy consequence of the carelessness of his eye, and a sort of compensation for the suspension of his vigilance; and we must be allowed to express our serious doubts on the efficacy of a *principal* corporal punishment, either on the object of it, or in the example; although it may have been defended by the stern authority of Dr. Johnson, and of that Dionysius,

who was once a tyrant at Syracuse, and afterwards became a school-master at Corinth. A chaplet of laurel is, in our minds, worth a cart-load of birch; and we think there is a magisterial authority to be attained, sufficient for its ends, without recurring to frequent manifestation of power. Yet, at the same time, we are perfectly sensible, that nothing will be more destructive to the maintenance of good order and due subordination, within the walls of this Institution, than any idea spreading through the pupils of a divided or incomplete authority in the preceptors, and, therefore, of a constant appeal to the Board of Visitors. We think, that it is only in extreme cases, few, if any, of which, we hope will ever occur, that the Boards will have to interfere with any of the teachers in their necessary, and, except in such cases, their exclusive authority over their respective schools.

All the Masters and Professors are to be deemed co-ordinate; responsible only for the management of their own departments; not possessing any authority over each other; and all are equally accountable to the authority of the Boards, in the manner and degree laid down by the laws. The joint Boards are to be considered as the Principal or Provost of the Academical Institution; nor can we have the least apprehension of any discord or misunderstanding among the acting Members of the Institution, or between them and the Boards of Managers and Visitors, if the general good of the establishment be an object of their common concern.

We shall soon have to submit to your revision a code of regulations for the interior economy of the Institution, and the management of the schools, so as not to interfere, either in place or time, with each other. In short, all the different Teachers are to be considered just as fingers of the same hand; separated, yet united; conjoined for the use and ornament of life, each sustaining and sustained, and the absence of one of which would prove a misfortune, and a deformity.

We trust, Gentlemen, that in a Seminary of literature, an appropriate quotation from an ancient author will not be deemed improper, provided it be found extremely applicable to the occasion of this meeting. We shall therefore read a passage from one of the latest Classics, the amiable and excellent Pliny the Younger, in a letter of his to the first of historians,

Tacitus; and we shall subjoin a free translation of the venerable original.

"Proximè quum in patria mea fui, venit ad me salutandum municipis mei filius prætextatus. Huic ego, Studes? inquam. Respondit, Etiam. Ubi? Mediolani. Cur non hic? Et pater ejus (erat enim unà, atque etiam ipse adduxerat puerum,) Quia nullos hic præceptores habemus. Quare nullos? Nam vehementer intererat vestra qui patres estis (& opportunè complures patres audiebant) liberos vestros hic potissimum discere. Ubi enim aut jucundius morarentur quàm in patria aut pudicitius continerentur quàm sub oculis parentum? aut minore sumptu quàm domi? Quantum est ergo collata pecunia conducere præceptores? quodque nunc in habitationes, in viaticæ, in ea quæ peregrè emuntur (omnia autem peregrè emuntur) impenditis, adjicere mercedibus? Proinde consentiè, conspire, majoremque animum ex meo sumite, qui cupio esse quàm plurimum quod debeam conferre. Nihil honestius præstare liberis vestris, nihil gratius patriæ potestis. Edoceantur hic qui hic nascuntur, statimque ab infantia natale solum amare, frequentare consuescant. Atque utinam tam claros præceptores inducat, ut a finitimis oppidis studia hinc petantur! utque nunc liberi vestri aliena in loca, ita mox alieni in hunc locum confluant" &c. "I was lately," says Pliny, "at my native place, when the son of a man of some consequence in the neighbourhood came to pay me his respects. 'Are you a student?' said I. He answered, 'Yes.' 'And where do you pursue your studies?' 'At Milan.' 'Why not at home?' His father, who accompanied the boy, replied, 'Because we have no choice of masters in this place.' 'And why have you not?' said I; 'for certainly nothing can be of more prime importance to every father of a family, (and luckily there were many present at our conference,) nothing can be more desirable than that your children should be educated in the place of their nativity. Where can their hearts find such sweet and strong attachments? Where can their passions be kept in such wholesome restraint as under the guardian eyes and superintendence of their parents, never far distant from their preceptors? Where can they be taught at such moderate expence, or get masters at rates so reasonable, while the money now expended in travelling to another land, in board and

lodging, in fees, and various other expenses, might be laid out much more profitably at home, where parents may be at all times at hand to judge of the progress and behaviour of the pupils, and to restrain or enlarge the expenditure, as circumstances may suggest.

Wherefore, let me beseech you, to unite with a perfect consonance of sentiment, with head and heart, person and purse, in bringing education, a course of useful and liberal instruction, home to our very doors. Let not children, as they too often are, be a restraint upon their parents, but let the parents be always prepared to restrain their children, not removing from their sight and society, their offspring, at the sweet spring time of life, but watching with delight, yet with anxiety, the blossoming mind, the development of the heart and affections, as well as of the understanding, and never suffering these best and noblest qualities of the human creature to shrivel up in a foreign country, for want of their proper objects. You cannot, believe me, you cannot perform a service more useful to your children, or more honourable, and at the same time, profitable, to your dear and native land. Here, they were born; here, let them be bred; and in their rising years, let them be early accustomed (and what is education, but early custom?) to taste the sweetness of the natal soil, and to associate every thing instructive, amiable, and endearing, with the words, *OUR COUNTRY*. Very sincerely do I wish, you may select preceptors of such abilities, as may attract scholars from other parts, and as at present your children are obliged to resort to another country for a complete education, the time may speedily arrive, when those of another country may come among you for the same good purpose.

Such were the sentiments and advice of Pliny to his compatriots, and we think them well adapted even at this day, to call forth your most serious consideration. It would be presumptuous in us to add any words of our own to the weight of such an authority; and we therefore conclude, with our most fervent good wishes, nay, even our prayers, for the progressive success of this seminary of popular education; that the object of the first founders may be perfected; that their present zeal may not be soon cooled, but may burn still brighter, and be continued to warm and animate their successors, and

those who shall succeed to them; that the original spirit may not be lost by habitude and familiarity; that Government may find it the best political economy to retain and secure the hearts of the people, by encouraging and fostering such institutions as the present, without attempting to encroach on their *self-government*; that the public may find reason to applaud our designs, and to contribute to their full accomplishment; that a spirit of accommodation, and a reciprocity of good offices may ever prevail within these walls, among the Directors, the Masters and Professors; and that, in fine, our children, and our children's children, within these same walls, may reap the full benefits of intellectual and not less of moral improvement; so, that in their future progress, in their mature manhood, or even in their declining age, they may stop for a little in their journey of life, and pointing to this building, say, "*There it was we spent our most delightful and instructive days; there we were taught by the best and kindest of masters; there we learned not merely to understand, but to feel the Classics, to cultivate the arts and sciences, and to LOVE OUR COUNTRY!*"

So may it be, we pray to Heaven!

After the Marquis of DOWNSHIRE and the Marquis of DOWNSHIRE had addressed the Meeting,

The Rev. ANDREW O'BEIRNE, the Classical Teacher, rose and spoke to the following effect:

My Lord,

The eloquent discourse, which has just been read by our learned Visitor, your Lordship's very impressive address, and that of our noble Vice-President, have left me little to say. Allow me, however, to use this opportunity of giving scope to my feelings of exultation at this interesting moment. I cannot behold this numerous and most respectable audience assembled on such an occasion, without the most triumphant feelings and most pleasing anticipations. I triumph at the retrospect of difficulties subdued, and from the judgment, intelligence, and perseverance displayed in the struggle, I anticipate prosperity for our future course. Your Lordship will also please to permit me the expression of what, I hope, will be deemed an honest pride in the circumstance of my appointment to the situation of Classical Head Master. The manner of conferring the appointment was gratifying to me;

but this gratification was considerably heightened to my mind by considering the character of those, by whom it was conferred. I have accepted the situation with a deep sense of its arduous and manifold duties, and therewith a firm resolution to devote myself, with all my faculties, to the performance of those duties; and to this I pledge myself most solemnly. The pledge thus given for myself, I know, I may also give on behalf of my respected colleagues; from whom the Managers and Proprietors of this establishment may, I am convinced, assure themselves of every result to be expected from united talent and conscientiousness. Our learned Visitor has, with ingenuous allusion expressed his hope, that the Instructors in this establishment will not be displeased, should a Manager or any person concerned in the management of the Institution, suggest a hint, even on a subject wherein he may not be professionally skilled. To this I say for myself, that so far from feeling displeasure at the idea, that I look forward with satisfaction to the prospect of being favoured with their advice: and that, when I consider the difficulties they have surmounted, the discrimination, patience, and perseverance they have displayed through a series of years, the liberality and public spirit so conspicuous in all their conduct, I anticipate nothing but what may be naturally expected from men of enlightened minds; and will be consistent with the respect due to the character of those, whom they shall advise; and in this, I am persuaded, I speak the sentiments of my colleagues. From the activity, intelligence, energy, and unanimity, that influence every member of this establishment, we may, I think, my Lord, expect every thing, that such qualities bespeak; and I shall repeat my solemn assurance, that nothing shall be wanting on my part to fulfil the wishes and intentions of the public-spirited promoters of this most meritorious Establishment.

The joint boards of Managers and Visitors of the Belfast Academical Institution, have already apprized the public, that the schools attached to the Institution have been opened.

In contemplating their promising appearance so soon after commencement, the Boards experience the highest satisfaction. The rapid increase of pupils seems to justify the plans which have been adopted,

and satisfactorily demonstrates the opinion entertained of them, by those, who have had an opportunity of being acquainted with them. It also gives ground to hope, that the extension of the invaluable advantages of a good education; the end and aim of the Institution, will be finally effected.

The object of the present address is to lay before the public the leading principles in its plan, and to call the attention of the country at large to an establishment; which, it is hoped, will be found deserving of public patronage and encouragement. It was long observed with regret, that the great majority of those, for whom a course of education, beyond the mere school course, is requisite, has been obliged to have recourse to foreign seminaries. In the wish to obviate the inevitable attendant expences, and those hazards, which a parent would dread for his son, when removed from his control, the present establishment has originated. With an extension of its original plan it is intended to include all the schools necessary to furnish an extensive course of school education, and such an arrangement of professorships, as shall comprehend a complete system of science and polite literature.

At present, a gentleman of the first abilities is on the foundation, as Lecturer on Natural Philosophy and Chemistry, on each of which sciences he will commence a course of lectures on the first of May next.

The schools now proceeding with great vigor, are, 1stly, a Classical School, in which a judicious and comprehensive selection of the classics will be taught; 2dly, an English School, in which our native language will be taught on an extensive and philosophical plan; 3dly, a Mathematical School, in which will be taught mathematics pure and mixed, arithmetic, and the astronomical and mathematical principles of geography; 4thly, a Writing School, in which the pupil will be instructed in all the improvements of the art; and, 5thly, a French School, conducted by a French gentleman of known ability.

In the election of the professor and masters, the joint Boards were solicitous to exclude every consideration, save that of appropriate merit in the persons, whom they were to select, and attended therefore solely to the qualifications of moral cha-

acter, and requisite talent; and they feel the strongest confidence, that the gentlemen, who have been appointed, will justify the preference shown them.

The appointment of one person, even of acknowledged ability, as head of the the Institution, did not appear to the Managers and Visitors to be sufficient. They therefore extended equal care to the appointing of all the masters, and have reserved to themselves the power of appointment in future, by which means they hope to secure a succession of able and zealous instructors.

In order to promote still further the essential ends of the Institution, it was resolved, that each master should be entitled to all the emoluments arising from his own exertions: thus are secured to the pupil all the advantages, which may naturally be expected from ability urged to exertion by a sense of interest.

In apportioning the duties of the Mathematical master, it appeared an obvious improvement, that Arithmetic should be taught by *him*. For thus Arithmetic will regain its rank as a science, from which it has been degraded by the ordinary and injudicious mode of teaching it, and being begun on proper principles, will be more readily and more easily impressed on the mind.

To expatiate on the excellencies of these plans will be needless. This mere statement of them therefore is submitted to the discernment of the public, to whom this

address is made in the firm confidence, that an establishment planned solely with a view to national benefit, will not fail to obtain national encouragement.

TERMS OF THE SCHOOLS.

Classical School.

Board—and Tuition in Greek, Latin, Ancient Geography, History and Mythology, 40 guineas per ann.

Washing, 5 guineas per ann.

Day Boys, 1 guinea per quarter. *No Entrance.*

English School.

Board,—and Tuition in English, Modern Geography and History, 40 gs. per ann.

Washing, 3 guineas per ann.

Day Boys—Instruction in the English Course, half-a-guinea per quarter.

Geography, half-a-guinea per quarter. *No Entrance.*

Mathematical School.

Arithmetic, half-a-guinea per quarter.

Mathematics, pure and mixed, 1 g. per qr.

Geography, connected with the Astronomical and Mathematical principles of the Science, half-a-guinea per quarter. *No Entrance.*

Writing School.

Writing, half-a-guinea per quarter. *No Entrance.*

French School.

Tuition, one guinea per quarter. *No Entrance.*

Dancing, Music, Drawing, on the terms of the most approved Masters.

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

ADDRESS OF THE CATHOLIC BOARD TO THE PEOPLE.

Fellow-Countrymen, and Fellow-Sufferers,

The General Board of the Catholics of Ireland, to whom you have confided your petitions to the Legislature, once more address you. They claim the continuance of your confidence only, because they feel that they deserve it, by the zeal and purity of their intentions and exertions in the cause of your Religion and your Country.

Fellow-Countrymen, The object of your petitions is sanctioned by justice; it is enforced by wisdom; it must be attained,

unless the artifices of your enemies shall triumph over Justice and Wisdom; we say their artifices, because their arguments have failed, and their calumnies are forgotten or despised.

Amongst their artifices we dread but one: it is that which has been already practised with success on former occasions; it is one to which you are exposed by your situation, your sufferings, and your feelings; your enemies wish to betray you into illegal associations and combinations; they wish to bring upon you punishment, aggravated by its being merited, and they still more earnestly desire to ruin your cause and that of Ireland.